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Fossil fuel violence and visual practices on Indigenous land: Watching, witnessing and resisting settler-colonial injustices

Samuel J. Spiegel

School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, 19 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, Scotland, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

While controversial plans for fossil fuel pipeline-building continue across Indigenous lands without consent, how are visual practices – including watching and witnessing – serving as modes of resistance? Drawing on a participant-observation ethnography over the 2018–2021 period with environmental defenders on Coast Salish land, in what is colonially called 'British Columbia, Canada', this article offers a lens for exploring visual realms of resistance amid expanding extractivism, police surveillance and reconfigured pipeline opposition during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grassroots photography in land-based monitoring, artistic communication in and around courtrooms and other visual practices have been serving as powerful inflection points, countering multiple facets of petro-colonialism – ecological destruction, health threats, and moral and legal transgressions by companies and state institutions. They have also been stimulating new collective actions, some led by Indigenous land protectors extending longstanding traditions of protecting human and non-human life. As 'more-than-representational', visual encounters can be active players in constructing knowledge, challenging structures of dispossession, genocide and ecocide, and cultivating understandings of care, sovereignty, climate justice and anti-colonial solidarity from heterogeneous vantage points. Some environmental defenders' visual creativities invite deep reflection on ontologies rooted in reciprocity and respect that are thoroughly ignored in extractivist settler-colonial cultures. The article situates visual strategies in fraught political contexts of ramped-up police and corporate surveillance targeting Indigenous land protectors and other environmental defenders, underscoring critical concern about superficial optical allyship and hollow gestures by state actors responding to racism and state violence on Indigenous land. It calls for attention to dialectical relationships amongst state visual tactics and counter-hegemonic visual practices in struggles to resist colonial energy regimes and to cultivate efforts towards alternative, less destructive energy futures.

1. Introduction: seeing and watching in the age of fossil fuel violence

Visual encounters – including practices of seeing, watching, witnessing and representing – can play powerful roles in struggles over fossil fuel extraction regimes, reflecting diverse values, interests and cultural processes. Some practices of visual representation mislead, stigmatize and marginalise, reinforcing racist interactions and cultural hegemonies [1-4]. In contrast, however, others might contribute to visual sovereignty and resistance in Indigenous communities amid efforts to oppose unwanted oil pipelines and colonial power, as Brígido-Corachán (2017) considered in the context of Standing Rock in the United States [5]. Practices of visual resistance constitute important yet often under-explored and under-theorized dimensions of longstanding struggles over fossil fuel pipelines, at times as a nexus for re-imagining ideas and discourses of identity across multiple scales [6]. From critical 'watching back' against land degradation and colonial oppression as police and corporate surveillance intensify, to the witnessing of environmental defenders prosecuted in courtrooms, I suggest here a lens through which to understand dynamic fossil fuel contestations and their linkages as well as the reconfigurations during the COVID pandemic. Extending literatures on the use of visual surveillance to criminalize environmental defenders and the performativity of images, this article calls for attention to how visual practices are embedded in the ever-changing dynamics of ongoing colonisation and anti-colonial struggles, drawing upon experiences from early 2018 to the beginning of 2021 on Indigenous lands – in what is now colonially called 'British Columbia' (by the Government of Canada to describe the western-most province of its federation).

My overarching aim here is to explore how critical visual thinking

E-mail address: sam.spiegel@ed.ac.uk.

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around energy regimes may – in some cases – be part of 'activism that resists settling on colonial ways of knowing place' [7]. Beyond unpacking discrete visual practices, the interrogating of multiple visual encounters as connected in systems of oppression and resistance offers a lens into dialectical relations that shape hegemonic and counter-hegemonic worlds of seeing. From state surveillance to monitor environmental defenders who oppose energy megaprojects [8–10] to the advertisement campaigns of the fossil fuel industry [6], visuals often play consequential roles amplifying agendas of corporations and practices of what Finn (2013) calls 'seeing surveillantly' [11]. Visual practices may also disorient and re-orient. Works of art may make hidden spaces visible, engendering attention to emotion and affect [12]. Acts of witnessing, watching, seeing and representing are, of course, never just acts; they are embedded in constantly moving relations with diverse possibilities for tapping into colonial and/or anti-colonial politics, and diverse theories of change, ethics and subjectivities at play. There is now growing interest in visual practices as a nexus for seeing how power asymmetries are inscribed in spaces of environmental politics [13]. Yet, while much scholarly writing has addressed fossil fuel impacts by exploring visual representations of climate change and sometimes shocking environmental degradation shown in news media [14], the interplay of multiple (radical as well as less radical) visual practices in contexts of contested fossil fuel projects has, in many milieus, received surprisingly little attention.

This article particularly focuses on experiences unfolding on CSkwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Sel̓íl̓weta?/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Secwépemc and Wet'suwet'en lands. Its approach focuses on three distinct periods of counter-watching, witnessing and making injustices visible, particularly in regard to the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion (TMX), a megaproject designed to triple the amount of heavy oil (bitumen) transported from the Alberta tar sands across more than 140 Indigenous Nations' territory, presenting threats to planetary wellbeing due to climate impacts as well as local health, ecosystems, economies and cultural rights [15][1]. While my own field research focused on place-based struggles around TMX, the analysis is contextualized by also exploring the simultaneous efforts of Indigenous-led movements to resist the Coastal Gaslink pipeline which is set to move fracked gas through the land of the Wet'suwet'en people further north in BC, in direct affront to their sovereignty [16,17].[2] I focus first on the burgeoning anti-pipeline resistance movements in BC between March 2018 and January 2020; then on a period of rapid growth of these movements in February 2020 right after militarised police raids and before the COVID pandemic hit; and, finally, on transformations after the pandemic struck in March 2020 – including analysis of the (non)performativity of images and 'optical allyship' [20] of state actors in this period.

Each of these periods was punctuated by various visual practices that reflect historically situated experiences, with various cultural politics, affects and relations at play. The 2018–2021 era constitutes a critical time span for grappling with systemic racism that propels unjust energy systems [21] and conceptualising, visually, the sometimes more distant or less evident impacts that Healy et al. (2020) broadly refer to as embodied energy injustices [22]. In this context, my approach interrogates visual practices that are both representational and more-than-representational [4,23], extending discussions in Energy Research and Social Science that have accentuated non-visual – discursive – tactics at play amid hegemonic constructions of Canadian fossil fuel infrastructure [18,24,25]. It builds on political ecology scholarship and other fields that call for carefully recognising how fossil fuel injustices are produced out of systems of structural violence and conceptualised within and across different epistemic communities [26,27], recognising seeing as both a political practice and an embodied relational experience.

While dimensions of fossil fuel violence[3] may be seen from various vantage points, some partially invisibilised at times by state and corporate actors, various hegemonic and counter-hegemonic possibilities are at play and constantly changing in relation to seeing and narrating pasts, presents and future. While this time period is notable for many reasons, one of the developments that contextualises it lies in the efforts of TMX executives, by 2021, to invisibilise the identities of new insurers, to protect them from boycotts and public resistance campaigns, after some previous transnational investors and insurers publicly withdrew their financial backing for pipelines [31]. In contexts of pipelines, some fossil fuel violence is perpetually hyper-visible [32] for certain people and groups. As Amy Scott Metcalf and Kwagu'ł scholar Sarah Hunt have respectively emphasized, methodologies that centre witnessing amid relations of settler-colonial violence in Canada require careful attention to multiply situated experiences and articulations of Indigenous dispossession and resurgence [33,34], with sensitivity to diverse social positionalities and possibilities that challenge settler-colonial violence and colonial ways of seeing. I suggest that engaging with a relational responsibility around seeing and witnessing requires reflection on what it means to bear witness to court proceedings, overt and subtle racism, climate and multi-species endangerment, and the polluting of waterways on Indigenous territories, not merely in given moments but also over time, appreciating interconnected social and political relations around visual practices. My methodology, described below, explicitly addresses the interconnectedness of sites of seeing and witnessing, in places of land and water protection, in the courthouse, in the streets and online. Extending critiques of state-centric seeing, it seeks to advance a pluralistic methodological approach [35] that challenges the commodification of human and non-human life, structures of dispossession and genocide, and ongoing colonial visual practices that stand in tension with avenues for recognising sovereignty and respectful co-existence rooted in values of reciprocity.

Against the backdrop of these concerns, the first section below situates the politics of seeing, watching, witnessing and visually representing injustices surrounding fossil fuel pipeline expansion in 2018 and thereafter. It provides some context for understanding visual practices around fossil fuels in Canada followed by a description of the methodological approach I took to analyse efforts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmental defenders seeking to protect communities from the interrelated threats of fossil fuel pipelines, systemic racism and later also COVID-19. I then explore each of the three periods of contestation leading to a time of pipeline construction activity that proceeded rapidly amid the pandemic, despite large-scale public opposition, ending with a discussion of the dialectics of visual practices, complexities of researching visual politics and implications for critically theorising (in)visibility and visual resistance.

[1] A map of the pipeline and timeline of key events in the development of TMX are provided by Kraushaar-Friesen and Busch in 2020 in this journal [18]. Locations of Indigenous Nations along the pipeline route can also be seen in Jonasson et al. [19] in unpacking the politics of omissions in environmental and health impact assessment.

[2] Founded in 2009, the Unist'ot'en camp established by the Wet'suwet'en people was the first among numerous Indigenous-led uprisings against fossil fuel pipelines in North America – including Keystone XL, TMX, Enbridge Line 3, Dakota Access and Bayou Bridge. In 2019, a year before the events described in this article, heavily armed police arrested 14 people at a Wet'suwet'en checkpoint, having deployed an array of surveillance, including armed police patrols, a jet boat, helicopter, drone technology, heat-sensing cameras and close monitoring of key land defenders. Police also established a "media exclusion zone", blocking reporters from accessing the area [19].

[3] In using the term "fossil fuel violence", I refer to both the violent material and biophysical impacts of fossil fuels and the vast state-corporate apparatuses [28] that shape dispossession and structural violence in the name of promoting extractivism as modernisation. This term aims, as with Michael Watts' 'petro-violence', to recognise social and ecological violence [29], and is inextricably interlinked with setter-colonial violence [30] and its attendant ecocide and genocide [17].

2. Seeing (not) like an extractivist state

2.1. Contextualising visual (petro-)politics in Canada

Globally, oil and gas pipeline projects have been heavily opposed by numerous Indigenous Nations, yet media discourses have widely eclipsed the concerns and values of people in regions affected, particularly Indigenous people's [18]. While notions of 're-visualising' resource extraction-related struggles are products of multiple epistemological choices and affects [36,37], questions of vantage point and positionality are fraught with politics: whose perspectives are prioritised and why? How is seeing reflective of political processes but also actively shaping such processes? Practices of representing western Canada as a 'resource frontier' for extraction and associated settler-colonial imaginings of landscapes have a long racist history, ignoring and obscuring Indigenous ways of knowing, seeing, representing and interacting [38]. Bruce Braun's work on 'colonialism's afterlife' in British Columbia shows numerous ways in which colonial approaches to vision and visuality inflect contemporary conversations about land, resources, institutions and environmental imaginaries on Indigenous territory, from landscape painting to photography [39]. Both the TMX and Coastal Gaslink projects have been recognised as violating the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and are the subject of ongoing legal challenges, Indigenous land defence actions and civil disobedience by non-Indigenous allies. Both projects are also entangled in political agendas that have relied on extensive visual tactics in the service of expanding the fossil fuel industry. These tactics, as discussed below, not only extend practices of 'seeing like a state' [40] that present territories as property grids for oil developments through settler-colonial calculations and representations [41], but also seek to turn people into 'extractive subjects' [42] entangled in narratives about the inevitability of extractive capitalist expansion.

Across Canada and what is now called Turtle Island, a term widely used by Indigenous peoples to refer to North America at large, Indigenous communities have at times been inundated with police using video cameras while coming onto Indigenous land to make arrests, particularly when fossil fuel developments were at stake [43]. Monaghan and Walby discuss how the long-standing close relationship between Canada's energy sector and national security agencies was further fortified to protect pipeline infrastructure, and how, while activists for Indigenous rights have long been under surveillance by the Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP), these activities have been largely hidden from public view [9]. Information about Project SITKA, a surveillance collaboration between the RCMP and various 'intelligence' agencies launched to shape public perceptions of Indigenous rights activists following two well-publicised Indigenous-led social movements in Canada: Idle No More, and Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women [44], was only made known following Freedom of Information requests which brought this monitoring of peaceful legal opposition to public attention [45].

Visual surveillance of land defenders is not the only visual tactic used by state authorities and resource corporations. To serve settler-colonial extractivist interests, an accompanying tactic has been to characterize the reasons for resistance as unknown or unsubstantiated, undermining Indigenous peoples' claims to sovereignty. This has included using the mainstream media to present Indigenous experiences while ignoring the ongoing colonial history that continues to produce structural injustices [46], and often depicting Indigenous concerns about environmental degradation as 'irrational and hostile threats to settler common sense' [45,p.174]. Visual tactics to this end were increasingly deployed in 2018 and 2019, as Canadian federal government authorities asserted that building fossil fuel pipelines was 'in the national interest' [6,47]. A twenty-three million-dollar campaign launched by the Government of Alberta entitled 'Keep Canada Working' to push forward the TMX project inundated the Canadian public with social media advertisements, billboards and television commercials portraying fossil fuel expansion as a sort of an economic dream situation – attractive and clean. Imagery was used to (try to) create consent to fossil fuel projects using cartoons of birds dropping dollars from the sky into the hands of Canadians; graphs portrayed guaranteed economic benefit and photographs depicted the building of sparkling clean oil pipelines without affecting beautiful pristine environments-promoting an ideal of settler-colonial Canada that spends money on public health, takes care of nature and embraces modernization. As Riley explained, Alberta's oil industry promoters were 'getting away' with running highly misleading ads on TMX. Deception was possible, Riley explained, because Canada's Code of Advertising Standards is meant to ensure accuracy but 'doesn't apply to political issues'– allowing falsehoods to flourish [48]. The ad campaigns have been critiqued for, among other problems, obfuscating the reality that Canada cannot meet Paris Climate Accord commitments if TMX proceeds, and concealing threats to Indigenous health [49]. As critically accentuated by Kuteleva and Leifso, while not monolithic, text-based and visual oil discourses at provincial, national and international levels all tend to marginalize and suppress discourses that speak to concerns of Indigenous peoples [6].

Significantly, in 2018, police in Canada used an expanding array of surveillance tactics to monitor land defenders who stood on roads in front of TMX pipeline construction alleged to be defying a court injunction [50].[4] This was occurring on unceded traditional Indigenous territory – that is, land that was never ceded by Indigenous nations to any Canadian government (nor previously to Britain) and stolen by means of colonial dispossession. By early 2020, expanded police tactics included using remote video surveillance footage to show a person's presence (even for short periods of time) on public roads and walkways in front of TMX construction zones – as the basis for bringing criminal contempt charges [51]. Yet, throughout this period, intensified efforts at 'watching back' – by land and water defenders – also emerged in various locations along the pipeline routes. For example, on what is colonially called 'Burnaby Mountain, British Columbia,' Indigenous Coast Salish members, spiritual leaders and youth erected a traditional Watch House as part of their multi-pronged resistance to the TMX project. A Watch House – Kwekwecnewtxw or 'a place to watch from' in the Hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ (Halkomelem) language[5] – is rooted in the spirituality and cultural practices of the Coast Salish Peoples. As shown in Fig. 1a, the structure, made of cedar planks, positioned near the south eastern corner of Trans Mountain Corporation's property line, according to those who care for the Watch House and organise its activities, is a traditional structure used for tens of thousands of years to watch for enemies on their territories and protect their communities from danger. This danger became manifest in the form of pipelines designed to cross Indigenous territories despite opposition from Indigenous communities along the routes. Other related forms of critical watching were also taking place at a broader international oversight level; following complaints lodged by Coast Salish nations, in January of 2020 the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged Canada to immediately stop the construction of the TMX and Coastal Gaslink projects until they obtained approval from affected Indigenous peoples.

2.2. Positionality and methodological approach to the politics of seeing

I use the term 'seeing' here to refer to becoming aware, more than just with one's eyes; 'watching' implies conscious attention over a period of time, for example, to guard or monitor violations of rights or health, safety or environmental transgressions; 'witnessing' refers to seeing that allows attesting to specific facts or bearing witness to certain events (such as witnessing court proceedings and acts of brutality).

[4] On March 15, 2018 the BC Supreme Court granted indefinite injunction preventing protesters from coming within five metres of TMX work sites or from occupying roads leading to the sites. More than 240 people have since been arrested. Police were originally empowered to make arrests only after people had been asked to leave.

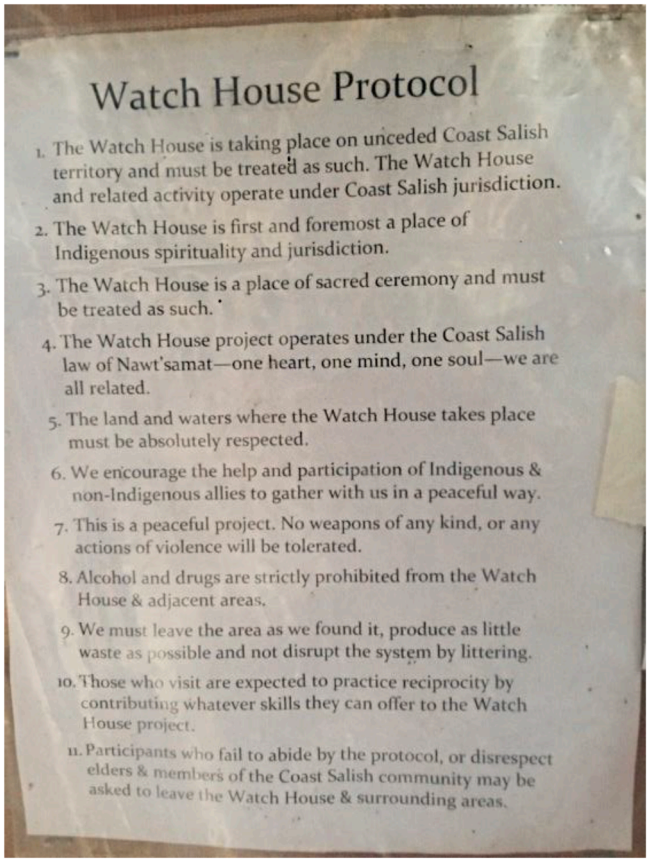
[5] *Hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓*, spoken in that area, is a dialect of the Halkomelem language, one of the Salishan languages.

Fig. 1a. Coast Salish Watch House (Kwekwecnewtxw - "a place to watch from"). On unceded Tsleil-Waututh territory, a Trans Mountain expansion (TMX) construction site is shown in the background, with TMX surveillance cameras pointing outward; the Watch House in the foreground was built by the Tsleil-Waututh Nation to monitor activities on the TMX site – watching back. The visual illustration to the left of the Watch House door is a spiritually important image but one that an Indigenous elder once told me can only be explained by the local Nation's people, not he, who is a guest on this land, from a different Nation; thus, my introduction to this visual serves as a reminder of what it means to be a guest, to not culturally appropriate, to not extract, but to listen, watch and learn. Photo source: author.

Seeing, watching and witnessing are always necessarily situated and specific practices culturally, politically and temporally, embedded in particular aspirations and diverse positionalities. Critical forms of watching – at the Watch House and other sites – transformed dramatically between 2018 and 2021. The Watch House was, in part, a place for physical presence and watching; it also had wider symbolic functions as a place of gathering. At times it became a nexus for collective organising. On March 10th 2018, as a non-Indigenous person on Indigenous land, I was one of the more than ten thousand people marching past the Watch House site erected that day by members of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (the local Nation known as People of the Inlet) as part of an Indigenous-led rally along with non-Indigenous allies. As people approached the Watch House, they listened to Indigenous elders and leaders enlisting support to join a peaceful movement. Many images on signs of those marching alluded to the breach in the campaign pledges by Justin Trudeau prior to becoming Prime Minister – which was to proceed with pipeline construction only if 'consent' is granted by the affected Indigenous nations. By March of 2020, when the COVID-19 crisis struck Canada, new meanings to watching – at the Watch House and elsewhere – had emerged. Despite a shut-down of virtually all sectors confining many people to their homes, those living near pipeline construction sites could still see the ramping up of contested pipeline construction activities.

Since my first visit to the Watch House in March 2018, I returned on several occasions to continue learning from Indigenous elders. By 2020, some of the land defenders were later controversially barred by the provincial Supreme Court from returning to the Watch House due to its proximity to the TMX construction. Some elders also had growing health challenges – aggravated, in some cases, from imprisonment for sacred prayer in front of the TMX construction. Supporters and allies[6] were welcomed and further encouraged to help with the watching, including in grassroots photography campaigns. Taking cues from Gillian Rose's invitation to see various kinds of visuals as more than just 'illustrations', but as 'active players' [55] in constructing knowledge and relations, my methodology became centred on exploring not just how visual surveillance by fossil fuel industry interests could be hegemonic but also how 'counter watching' could play vibrant roles in movements. I was interested in learning particularly from Indigenous elders and from the Watch House Protocol under Coast Salish jurisdiction, which articulates values of reciprocity, care and respect[7] (Fig. 1b).

Such engagement required reflection on a question often mentioned in gatherings of water and land protectors: what does it mean to be a good ancestor, and to think in timeframes of seven generations or more? A frequent point of reference at the Watch House and other places of reflection was 'all my relations', a term used by elders at events to acknowledge and respect relations-in-place, relations that connect people across places, generations, eras, and Tsleil-Waututh laws [56]. Exploring this meant rethinking terrains of seeing, watching and witnessing alongside efforts toward radically decolonising thinking about relations linking people, land, water and animals. For me, particularly as a non-Indigenous person in Canada, this entailed reflecting on the many intersecting forms of oppression and complicity in a settler-colonial


Watch House Protocol

1. The Watch House is taking place on unceded Coast Salish territory and must be treated as such. The Watch House and related activity operate under Coast Salish jurisdiction.
2. The Watch House is first and foremost a place of Indigenous spirituality and jurisdiction.
3. The Watch House is a place of sacred ceremony and must be treated as such.
4. The Watch House project operates under the Coast Salish law of Nawt'samat—one heart, one mind, one soul—we are all related.
5. The land and waters where the Watch House takes place must be absolutely respected.
6. We encourage the help and participation of Indigenous & non-Indigenous allies to gather with us in a peaceful way.
7. This is a peaceful project. No weapons of any kind, or any actions of violence will be tolerated.
8. Alcohol and drugs are strictly prohibited from the Watch House & adjacent areas.
9. We must leave the area as we found it, produce as little waste as possible and not disrupt the system by littering.
10. Those who visit are expected to practice reciprocity by contributing whatever skills they can offer to the Watch House project.
11. Participants who fail to abide by the protocol, or disrespect elders & members of the Coast Salish community may be asked to leave the Watch House & surrounding areas.

Fig. 1b. Watch House Protocol under Coast Salish Jurisdiction. Photo source: author (with permission to photograph).

[6] Klutzz et al. in '*Unsettling allyship, unlearning and learning towards decolonising solidarity*' [52] challenges assumptions around being an ally ([53,54]) noting that activists cannot self-identify as allies; rather, this designation must come from Indigenous leaders in specific contexts at specific times.

[7] The Protocol, presented to me when I visited, provided a deeply important foundation for the participatory research which followed, namely that the Watch House operates under Coast Salish laws, stressing absolute respect for the land and waters, peaceful ways, prohibition of alcohol and drugs, and expectations of reciprocity with visitors contributing whatever skills they could offer. Crown prosecutors objected vehemently to this protocol being read and entered as a court exhibit during the trial and sentencing of land defenders.

society where formal education systems often invisibilize – and/or reductively categorise – both Indigenous histories and contemporary Indigenous voices and visual articulations.

Visual ethnographies such as the approach adopted for this study invariably draw on multiple sites of interpretation and face power dynamics that link to historically specific moments [57], requiring engagement with a plurality of knowledges and methods [35]. Prior to the pandemic, as well as during, in addition to research with Indigenous elders and youth in community spaces that included the Watch House and sites of blockades, I spent over 200 hours witnessing various court proceedings at the British Columbia Supreme Court [50]. Such proceedings were widely understood as designed to punish people – Indigenous youth, elders and others – for peaceful resistance occupying land near pipeline construction zones. At times, elders were prosecuted for being in sacred ceremony for a mere 20 minutes, without a police officer giving an instruction to leave but merely captured on camera in front of the TMX gates. In the more than 30 trials and sentencing sessions I attended, I was interested both in how police video and photographic surveillance were presented as well as how courtside artists who observed the trials represented the proceedings, contrasting the court's colonial decor with depictions of Indigenous resistance and solidarity-building. More broadly, I became interested in the realms of visual practice embraced as various tactics at different times over a tumultuous 2018–2021 period, which I explored through in-person participation at events organized by Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmental and climate activist groups, as well as later in online interactions with small to sometimes large groups, and in several physically-distanced on-site events. Efforts at unsettling colonial ways of interacting can benefit from active learning both within and across social movements [52]. Knitting together the research interactions noted above, my approach for analysis engages visual encounters across interconnected settings, exploring counter-watching and witnessing as forms of situated resistance in dialectical relations with visual practices of the petro-state (Fig. 2).

Visual analysis may illuminate the affective and visceral politics of place-making and collective mobilisation in contested lands, while also prompting questions about what makes for a 'decolonial' approach in research [58]. As Morton et al. note, 'Images can illuminate the affective, haptic, visceral, and sensual aspects of human encounters with nature in-situ that may escape textual descriptions' [59]. As Eve Tuck and Bruce Yang point out with regards to theorising relationships between resistance, visibility and theories of change more broadly, such relationships are never straightforward, requiring us to ask about what things need to be in place 'for raising visibility to work' or conversely the instances in which visibility does 'not work' [60]. Below I analyse three constellations of critical visual practices that speak to transformations over the 2018–2021 period – i) seeing coloniality on the land and in the courtroom in the 2018–2019 period; ii) seeing intensified militarised state power around fossil fuels and heightened reasons for resistance-building in early 2020, spawning new public debate and impetus for anti-colonial dialogue; and iii) seeing dramatically reconfigured visual tactics in response to threats amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The social semiotic analysis used in this article adapts an approach often applied in visual storytelling-based research, including in a companion project to this study [49] in which Indigenous youth and elders chose the photographs to discuss. This approach asks 'what' the image constitutes (e.g. what the photograph, drawing, quilt, banner, art installation, performance, etc. depicts); why this is important ('so what'), and implications (i.e. 'now what?'). The 12 visuals selected for this article although not an exhaustive set, reflect key visual counter hegemonic narratives, themes and practices that emerged during the research. I situate these counter-hegemonic visuals through a discussion of extractivism, racialised capitalism and political struggles unfolding, including state actors' performative 'optical allyship' responses to imagery showing corporate and police violence.

3. Three periods of visual politics around fossil fuel pipelines

3.1. Seeing and watching coloniality on land and in courtrooms – March 2018–Decemeber 2019

In an age in which 'remote' surveillant technologies such as satellites and drones have dominated corporate knowledge production, academics seeking to decolonize surveillance studies call for attention to what Dene scholar Glen Coulthard referred to as 'land-based practices and forms of knowledge that emphasize radical sustainability' [61]. With diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous people engaged in photographic practices to show threats of oil spillage, ecosystem destruction and other dimensions of the fossil fuel industry, everyday visual encounters can be materially and symbolically important for diverse reasons. According to elders at the Watch House, the feeling of being watched was omnipresent, with at least 186 corporate surveillance cameras pointed outward from the Burnaby Terminal of the TMX project including at the Watch House itself[8]. Embracing radical sustainability for people supporting the Watch House meant rigorously documenting – through photography – day-to-day dynamics of illegal tree cutting, contamination, and unsafe practices that endanger both construction workers and the community – all issues of concern in TMX sites in Burnaby. 'Eyes on the ground'[9] served here to monitor ongoing effects of settler-colonial extractivism, and involved sharing photos on social media and with ministries responsible for regulatory oversight.

Elsewhere along the TMX pipeline route in BC, Indigenous women and other land defenders with the Tiny House Warriors[10] have also been active in photographing and video-recording both unwanted pipeline construction activities and police who repeatedly intruded onto their land. The Tiny House Warriors are a women-led movement aimed to stop the Trans Mountain pipeline from crossing unceded Secwepemc Territory by building ten tiny houses along the TMX route. Visually sharing experiences of racism, land desecration and outright theft by intruders – on social media (Twitter and Facebook) – has been a way of defending land and communities, raising awareness and building support. Here, acts of video-recording police – including the intruding RCMP videographers – could be interpreted as examples of visual politics playing out as anti-colonial resistance that challenges the extractivist colonial gaze up close, while asserting Indigenous land histories and rights.

Sentiments of watching while being watched have also been discussed in recent literature from this period, documenting, for example, how Tsleil-Waututh elders with deep historical knowledge saw the unwanted oil refinery on their land staring at them 'as an invasion'[49]. Some Tsleil-Waututh members post photos on Facebook when the refinery flame gets large, likening this to the 'Eye of Sauron' – a reference to the surveillance eye in The Lord of the Rings. Sharing such photos within the community and beyond was seen as a form of recalling traditional heritage while monitoring ongoing colonialism that perpetuates and repeats histories of fossil fuel invasions on unceded land. The

[8] Land defenders have stated in social media posts that tree removal was partly to allow the 186 cameras pointing towards the public to allow a private surveillance company, run by ex-RCMP officers, to gather facial recognition so as to identify 'persons of interest' for further surveillance and prosecution. Many noted that the cameras should instead be pointed inward at the dangerous tanks, to prevent disasters.

[9] The 'eyes on the ground' project is one of several organized by the Mountain Protectors, a group of land protectors and volunteers (of which I am one) who monitor TMX pipeline construction, organize events, and uphold a safe gathering space at kwecwecnewtxw (The Watch House) https://mountainprotectors.org/mountain-protectors-2

[10] The Tiny House Warrior movement aims to re-establish village sites and assert authority over unceded territories, with each of 10 tiny houses built along the pipeline route intended to provide housing to Secwepemc families facing a housing crisis due to colonialism http://www.tinyhousewarriors.com/

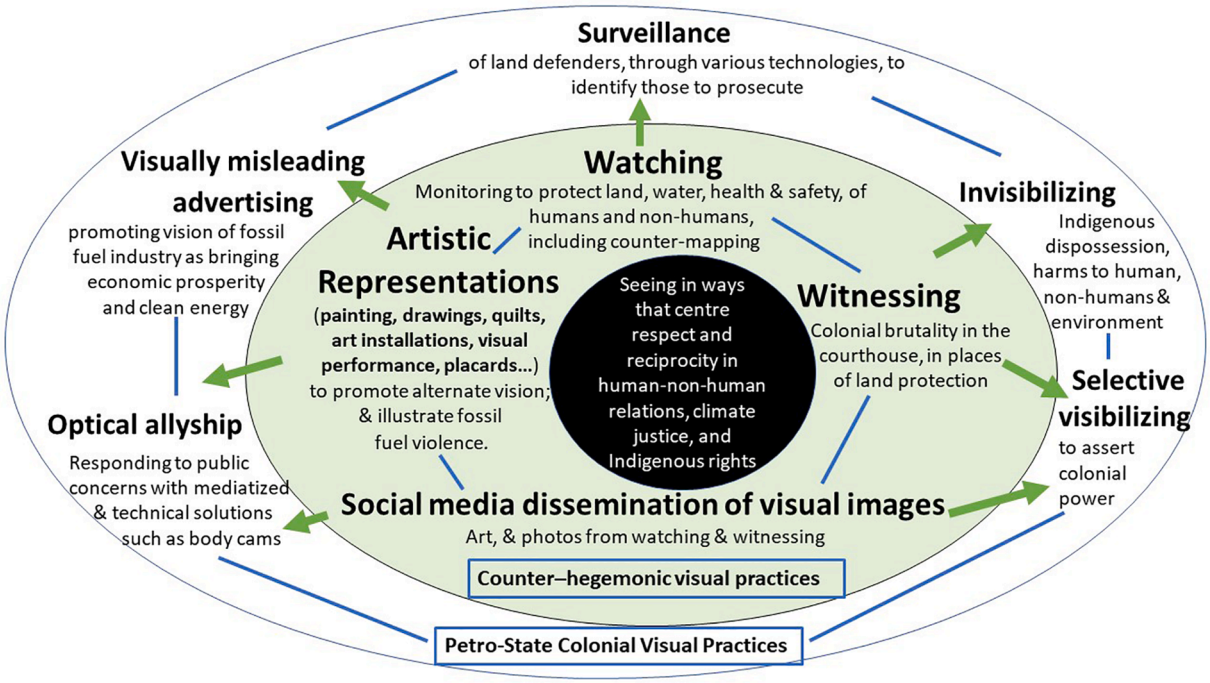


Fig. 2. Relationships of Petro-State Visual Practices and Counter-Hegemonic Visual Practices. This figure depicts the connectedness of various forms of visual practices employed by petro-colonial forces as well as of counter-hegemonic visual practices in struggles to challenge settler-colonialism and advance alternative ways of seeing. Locating diverse visual terrains that are interlinked and dynamic, this conceptual illustration seeks to centre values of respect and reciprocity in human and non-human relations, climate justice and Indigenous rights.

visual presence of the refinery is a reminder that TMX is not the first oil threat to the community but rather one that is layered onto histories of territorial ordering built on colonial logics of promoting fossil fuels and longstanding environmental racism. While Peeples broadly argues that 'toxins present an interesting challenge for visual construction in that they are often invisible and banal in their esthetics' [62], the 'often' is not 'always' and not applicable everywhere. Throughout the Tsleil-Waututh Nation's community centre and surrounding neighbourhoods, the visual presence of the fossil fuel industry is inescapably prominent – with its toxic exposures widely thought to be connected to cancers and other health conditions that could be exacerbated by TMX [15]. While Simpson (2020) aptly articulates how the "invisibility" of oil pipelines can contribute to their normalization and lends to a general perception that infrastructure 'is a mundane matter, far removed from issues of serious political concern' [28], sharing images showing past pipeline ruptures and forecasts of future disasters loom large in resistance movement efforts, in photos and maps shared on social media.

Making ecological and health threats more publicly visible is only one facet of opposition to fossil fuel expansion – another equally important dimension is making visible the resistance movements themselves. Campaigns led by the Tsleil-Waututh Nation showed global corporate shareholders the pipeline spillage risks at stake which pose vast threats to marine and land animal species, water and human life. Arguably, however, it was largely the making Indigenous resistance visible that prompted Texas-based Kinder Morgan to sell the TMX project in 2018, representing a short-lived victory for the movement, as this victory was quickly tempered when the Canadian federal government made the controversial decision to purchase the Kinder Morgan pipeline – paying 4.5 billion dollars in 2018. Leaders of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation continued, thereafter, to be active in presenting maps of historical and inter-generational connections to land, clean energy projects and sustainability plans, including protecting elk, salmon and endangered orcas imperilled by TMX, drawing on ancestral knowledges to educate provincial authorities, federal regulators and potential investors who might be courted by the federal government to take up ownership.[11] Visuals of threats, combined with efforts at visibilising significant resistance, were thus effective in shaping the struggle, albeit constricted in their impact.

What remains particularly hidden from public view, meanwhile, has been the structural violence of settler-colonial courtrooms – which are legally allowed to be rendered visible only through non-photographic or-video-graphic techniques, such as drawings. As I attended the BC Provincial Supreme Court, I found diverse people including acclaimed visual and theatre artists attending trials to witness court proceedings against land defenders and offered counter-visuals; some of the artists had been arrested themselves and, in some cases, jailed. On one day in 2018, a visual artist and I both heard the many arguments brought forward by the judge for disqualifying consideration of Indigenous law and jurisdiction, or the opportunity for defendants to invoke a 'necessity to act' defence. Repeatedly in the courtroom, all that mattered to the judge was whether the police video-recordings prove that a person was on the road near a TMX construction zone. Time was spent in tedious debate on whether the videos actually prove that defendant X knew that there was an injunction against being on a road; RCMP would show photographs and videos to purportedly confirm that the person in question must have known. As a court observer, I often saw prosecutors harken to the TMX photographs of injunction signs that purportedly served to tell pipeline opponents to leave the locations. What they

[11] Fundamental to the federal government's approach to 'selling the pipeline' to the public has been a divide-and-rule tactic that has tried to induce some First Nations to 'buy' in to the pipeline, while the most heavily affected First Nations have widely opposed TMX [17,49].

neglected to point out was the totem pole located right next to it at the TMX Burnaby terminal, which served, for land protectors, as a powerful visual reminder that this was unceded Indigenous territory with histories that TMX was trying to supress (Fig. 3). As I learned how that totem pole came into being from one elder, I heard a story of Indigenous-led resistance that remains undiminished: 'That totem pole is powerful. No one will dare even try to take it down.' In what appeared to be efforts to erase history itself, neither the prosecutors nor the judge allowed the court to officially acknowledge that the land was unceded traditional Indigenous land.

While the idea of 'hidden in plain view' is articulated in past work elsewhere on legal geography from a visual perspective [63], in this courtroom artistic depictions conveyed both non-hidden aspects of courtroom space as well as subtle elements of people on trial resilient when facing punishment. This includes the moment a 71-year old defendant received a 36-month jail sentence for entering a TMX construction zone, the moment another elder was sentenced to 7 days in jail for standing on the road, moments when the 'necessity to act' defence was denied, and another moment when a specialist formerly hired by the Kinder Morgan oil company because of her scientific expertise (Romilly Cavanaugh), was prosecuted for also standing on the road and opposing TMX; in that case, the science around toxins and evidence of serious health and ecological risks were shared, only for prosecutors to belittle her testimony. While industry and political elites have tried to portray environmental defenders in the media as 'protestors' without a sense of responsibility, the defendants all expressed concern for future generations and Indigenous rights, and showed extensive knowledge, including in some cases highly technical toxicological and public safety comprehension that prosecutors in the courtroom appeared to clearly lack. The drawings brought forward an austere court (Fig. 4) that defied natural laws of justice (see also Wong and Richards [64]).

This artist of the work shown in Fig. 4 and I attended court sessions in this provincial courthouse both before August 30, 2018 – a particularly symbolic date – and thereafter. TMX construction activity was supposed to be stopped after a Federal Court of Appeals ruled on August 30th that the construction permit should not have been granted in the first place, having had inadequate environmental impact assessment processes and fatally lacked 'meaningful' consultation with Indigenous People. The BC courthouse at times - briefly - became a zone for referencing photos of corporate construction activities – photographs that some defendants argued showed violations of laws before and after the federal ruling, images that were clearly, in powerful ways, 'objects of affect' [65] with great importance to those concerned. In Trans Mountain Pipeline LC v. Mivasair, the provincial court judge dismissed the concerns of defendants who gestured to photographic evidence of company violations of the federal court's ruling, stating that the contents of the photos were not relevant to his proceedings; he referred to citizen action groups and individuals who were taking photographs as contemptuous. The response of the court to state or corporate-produced visual images in contrast to environmental defender-produced images was a vivid display of the politics of seeing at play, with the court deciding what it will 'see'

Fig. 3. Trans Mountain Injunction Sign, Surveillance Camera Hovering and Totem Pole. This visual illustrates the juxtaposition of a totem pole conveying Indigenous histories and meanings beside a sign erected by the Trans Mountain Corporation to advise that they secured an injunction from the settler-colonial court to prevent anyone from obstructing their access. With Trans Mountain's surveillance camera hovering above, it also illustrates how those experiencing these contrasting visual messages are themselves being watched. I learned during hundreds of hours of witnessing trials (of land defenders) that the surveillance cameras are operated and monitored in real time by a surveillance team based in Alberta, many hundreds of kilometres away. Photo source: author.

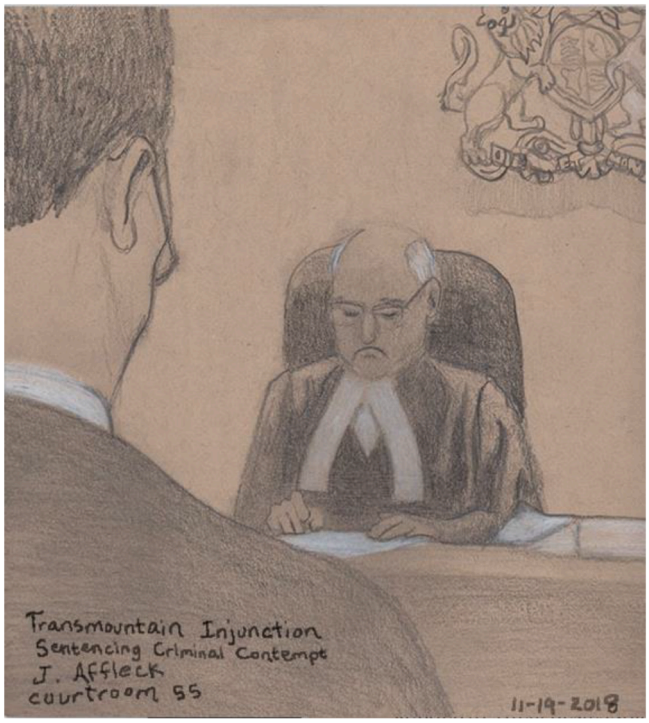


Fig. 4. Depiction of B.C. Supreme Justice Presiding Over the Trans Mountain Injunction Cases. Artist-witness: Joe Pepper (reproduced with permission).

or 'not see'.[12]

After one of the court sessions concluded early one day, a group of four courtroom observers and I travelled from Vancouver to Nanaimo (on Vancouver Island) to the venue where the National Energy Board (later rebranded as the Canadian Energy Regulator) and Trans Mountain Corporation held hearings to re-consult with Indigenous communities in proceedings widely critiqued for being superficial and inadequate. The state surveillance gaze again surfaced immediately there too; shortly after arriving at the building we found ourselves suddenly under phone-camera video surveillance by what appeared to be multiple company officials, from multiple angles. Were they RCMP? Or Trans Mountain company officials? Were they from other arms of state intelligence? Does it matter? Such questions make up some of the peculiar politics of surveillance uncertainty, entangled in what Monaghan and Walby call the Canadian 'petro-security apparatus' [9] that widely monitors environmental and Indigenous movements in public places, private places, and online.

3.2. Seeing militarised invasion, new solidarities and new symbolic images - February-March 2020

While the above forms of seeing link to a growing social movement against oil and colonial invasion – one that was being 'watched' while watching, the second major theme to emerge from this research was that of 'seeing' dramatic changes to fossil fuel politics and resistance in February of 2020. If visual ethnography aspires toward understanding 'affective experiences' [57] at play with visuals, such affective experiences were reconfigured across Canada after February 6th at 4:57am, with militarized police intensifying raids and arrests in Indigenous communities for the Coastal Gaslink project, elsewhere in BC. Pointing guns and aggressively arresting women on Wet'suet'en territory, the police were captured on video. Imagery of the militarised aggression began to circulate in media across the country and world.

As Sajir and Aouragh have argued in different contexts, 'although shocking images can awaken compassion toward the oppressed, they do not necessarily translate into movements of solidarity' [66]. In the case of images of Wet'suet'en raids, by contrast, considerable movement-building rapidly ensued. Networks of Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies organised across the country. As journalists were arrested for filming the police raid, the BC Civil Liberties Association immediately castigated the government for repressing basic rights. With swift actions taken by Indigenous Nations in Quebec, Ontario and other communities across the country to continue protest, with effective blockades of trains, roads, ports and other infrastructure, the solidarity actions in some cases re-centred Indigenous law in the discussion [67]. Narrating the dramatic images, some reports documented how the RCMP planned to use snipers in assault on Wet'suet'en 'protestors' with 'lethal overwatch' [19]; the imagery pointed to how militarizing police sets up Indigenous land protectors as the enemy, with the arming of police with military equipment sending the signal that they are in fact at war. Some government authorities went so far as telling people to stop sharing the images, as many circulated with the hashtag #Wetsuweten #ShutDownCanada. As has been documented in other anti-pipeline struggles, for example, in the US [12] as well as Italy and elsewhere [68], visuals played powerful political roles instantiating a new era of anti-pipeline solidarity in Canada, catalysing new creative resistance – in this case linking movements working to resist Coastal Gaslink, TMX and other colonial impositions.

The responses of some right-wing politicians displayed more racism towards Indigenous people and tried to paint the growing movement as 'protestors' (rather than land protectors) 'inconveniencing' the economy; yet various businesses that had to suspend operations due to the blockades unequivocally voiced public support regarding the defence of Wet'suet'en territory– calling for government dialogue with Indigenous nations instead of raids. The February solidarity blockades had far-reaching support and linked together a myriad of concerns about colonial aspects of fossil fuel impositions as well as broader injustices, with the images sparking a vast range of thematic focal points and collective reflecting beyond these shared visuals. In several Indigenous communities and on social media, images of police aggression were accompanied by photos showing burning court injunction papers, which became one of the most recognisable symbolic acts of the resistance.

As part of the conversation that was emerging across news and social media nationally, other images soon emerged as well, showing, for example, infrastructure such as railways – sites of some of the solidarity blockades –juxtaposing photographs of the contemporary pipeline controversy with images from 1885 of white men driving railway stakes into the ground [69]. Some discussions alongside the visuals linked to the killing of Indigenous women and the government's inaction on the recommendations of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This failure is powerfully depicted by hanging red dresses in full view, in public places that included sites near pipeline construction, extending the REDress Project which seeks to make colonial violence inescapably visible; the red dresses call attention to the connection between resource extraction projects such as TMX and Coastal Gaslink, and the increased risk of harm to Indigenous women and girls[13] (see Fig. 5). Both the sharing of pipeline raid images (e.g. Fig. 6) as well as related images of coloniality had functions as teaching devices, symbols to trigger discussion about racism and approaches to Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous people –re-imagining visual landscapes of everyday spaces and everyday racist violence. This movement-building in February and early March seemed to many at the time as a game-changer where various forms of 'solidarity through the visual' [70] were gaining in power.

3.3. Reconfigured visual encounters amid the COVID-19 pandemic – March-December 2020

A different era emerged, however, when the COVID pandemic hit Canada a couple of weeks later and produced a transformed landscape for anti-pipeline struggles – producing new power-laden visual encounters. Albertan government officials were openly exuberant that the pandemic severely limited the abilities of land defenders to resist, effectively removing blockades (at least initially). Recognising that the physical distancing public health requirements impeded resistance, one Albertan minister stated that the pandemic made it a 'great time' to build pipelines [71]. The TMX and Coastal Gaslink projects received controversial exemptions from general orders to cease work during the early days of the pandemic, despite other sectors being shut down.

[12] *Selective* use of state visuals has been a critical strategy of power. In some trials, a *distant video* was shown by Crown prosecutors to try to prove that the injunction order was read audibly by police to a large group of environmental defenders near a TMX construction site. During the defence's cross-examination of a police videographer, it became apparent that a *different video* was also made (by a different police officer) *far closer* to where the land protectors were actually standing, where it seemed impossible to hear the injunction reading due to multiple other voices speaking simultaneously (notably, a leader from the BC Union of Indian Chiefs, speaking on a different megaphone). The police and Crown prosecutors did not make available that 'closer' video. In another case, a video showed an Indigenous elder was on a road for only a brief period, peacefully participating in a pipe ceremony *with police* who did not make arrests, but the judge chose to only 'see' guilt and a case for incarceration.

[13] The REDress Project, originated by Métis artist Jaime Black, is an art installation project wherein red dresses were installed in public spaces throughout Canada and the US as a visual reminder of the staggering number of missing or murdered Indigenous women across Canada. https://www.jaimeblackartist.com/exhibitions/. Indigenous-led movements, along with supporters, have continued to use the powerful symbol of hanging red dresses at blockades and bringing red dresses to land defence marches and other events. Red dresses are also hung in the Watch House.

Fig. 5. Red Dresses Placed on the Fence of a TMX Construction Zone. This photo was taken at a "No More Stolen Sisters" event, in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous land protectors came together, participating in placing red dresses on fences along the road next to a TMX construction site. The red dresses call attention to the connection between resource extraction projects and amplified threats to Indigenous women and girls. Red dresses such as those depicted in this photo have been important symbols in movements resisting TMX and Coastal Gaslink and beyond, reminding not just the public and members of movements but also company personnel of real histories lived. Photo source: author. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

People I came to know from attending courtroom sessions, now confined to their homes, turned to engaging online in social media, while lamenting that pipeline-building amid the pandemic was an abuse of political authority and a clear form of disaster capitalism. Photographic evidence then surfaced showing new kinds of corporate transgressions. Elders from the Watch House and other Burnaby residents posted photographs illustrating rampant fossil fuel industry failures to 'physically distance' in construction worksites. On social media, photos of large and small groups of pipeline company workers interacting closely (without masks) circulated alongside words denoting growing threats (Fig. 7), with text concerned about both workers and Indigenous communities around them. Some photos showed company signs at TMX workcamp sites indicating that workers were only being told to physically distance 'where possible'. In this regard, attention to the visual semiotics of COVID-era photos emphasises what could be considered the visual politics of intensified corporate exceptionalism.

Oilsands workcamps were already linked to COVID-19 deaths by April 2020– documented in the context of Alberta's tar sands, where more than 100 cases of COVID were attributed to mobile workers spreading the virus and killing Indigenous Dene elders in Saskatchewan [73,74]. As Watch House elder Jim Leyden wrote in one report submitted to government authorities regarding TMX in Burnaby: 'Photographic evidence conflicts with the crown corporation's assurances that they are adhering to health guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19.' Visual evidence came in various forms: 'On the same day Ian Anderson [the company CEO] said the Trans Mountain sites were practicing social distancing, we photographed tailgate parties during lunch breaks…' and 'On the same day they took the logs off the beaches [as part of the province's wider closing of public spaces], we saw workers crowd around a construction shed…' Those entrusted with responsibilities at the Coast Salish Watch House issued pleas alongside the imagery, in addition to calling on dangerous activities to be closed: 'We also ask that all workers and supervisors coming from out-of-province go through a 14-day isolation period.'

The photographic evidence of corporate physical distancing failures at TMX worksites contrasted with images of land defenders who were physically distancing, in the cases where highly symbolic resistance in

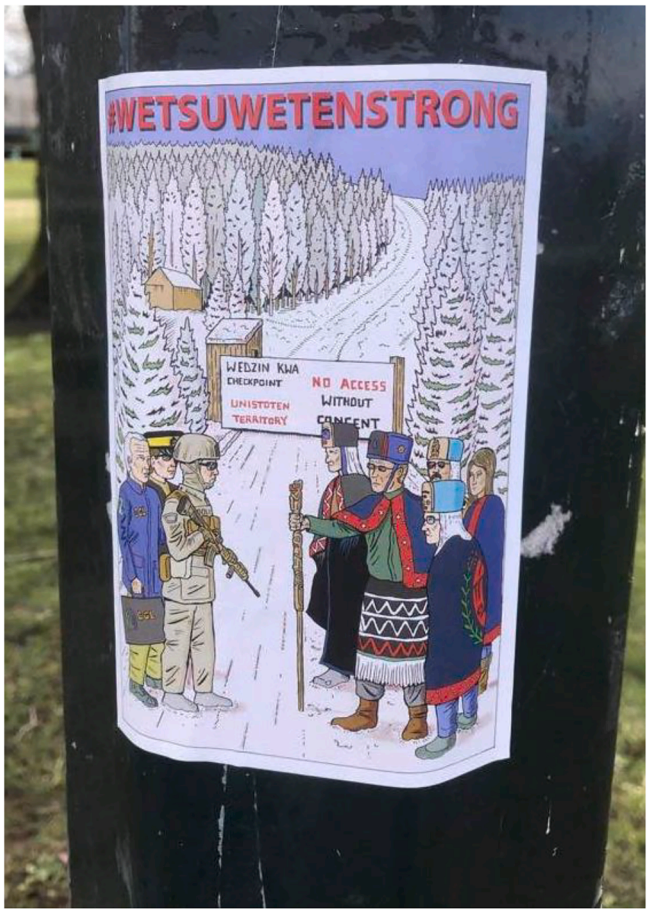


Fig. 6. Wetsuwetenstrong. Posted on a tree in Vancouver - to raise support for struggles led by the Wet'suwet-en people. In the early morning of 6 February 2020, heavily armed RCMP with tactical gear and dog teams advanced into the unceded traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en to enforce a court injunction against protesting the construction of a gas pipeline, arresting peaceful, unarmed Indigenous land defenders. Police helicopters and aircraft equipped with sensors and cameras flew overhead, and dog service teams joined RCMP patrols. As images circulated on social media, Indigenous peoples and allies responded with protests in Canadian cities across the country, peacefully disrupting the national economy by blocking transportation routes, such as ports and railways, demanding the withdrawal of the RCMP occupying unceded Wet'suwet'en territory. Photo source: Pia Massie.

physical form continued. Extinction Rebellion held various 'physically distanced' protests and blocked the entrance to one TMX construction site for one hour in an attempt to raise awareness of the major health concerns tied to COVID-19 and oil pipeline construction, calling for the government to immediately shut down work at sites where workers and communities were not safe. Images captured of the worksite were later taken to Burnaby City Hall and displayed on the ground, each 2 m apart (symbolically evoking the physical distance public health requirement). Demands – and photos – were sent to various ministries and regional health authorities beyond the City of Burnaby. However, little political traction emerged. 'We are frustrated that when we report violation to the governing bodies, the reports seem to be ignored or minimized,' expressed Leyden. 'This has led Trans Mountain to believe they are untouchable — the Teflon dons of the oil industry. They're protected by a federal government which is putting this project ahead of concern for the protection, safety and health of our community and environment.' Images of pipeline construction activities – and building entirely new workcamps with close quarters for workers – would thereafter begin to surface in various sites along the pipeline route. Hundreds of workers would be coming in and out of particular Indigenous communities for

Fig. 7. Trans Mountain Corporation's Failures to Physically Distance. This photograph, taken by a land protector on April 9, 2020, documents work camp practices in a TMX site where workers clearly were not physically distancing. Eventually, some changes were made by the Trans Mountain Corporation as a result of the visual evidence of non-compliance with public health orders, but only after months of infractions and denials. In January 2021, TMX was officially caught by regulators as having had more than three dozen violations of government COVID-19 public health orders (in a span of 3 days). After this became public, and after one worker died from a falling piece of equipment and another worker was serious injured after another accident, TMX public spokespeople acknowledged that they had safety issues to address. Although the company announced earlier that pandemic measures were all successful, it was also announced in 2021 that there were 91 cases of TMX workers with COVID-19 [72]. Watching and witnessing the many infractions has been frustrating for land defenders as well as members of the wider public who have been forced to subsidize TMX, with the minimal responses of safety, health and environmental authorities seen as part of a relentless state-enabled fossil fuel industrial complex that capitalizes on disaster and endangers workers and communities in the process.

construction work while the rest of the population was under a COVID stay-at-home order.

'Seeing' the pipeline's expansion during the COVID era thus entailed new frustrations, particularly in regions nearest construction work. At a virtual 'Town Hall' event held by TMX online, community members voiced concern about a new large company barrier which many residents felt was meant to visually conceal new infractions and unsafe practices. Meanwhile, large Zoom meetings were organised by movements – both Indigenous-led and otherwise – to assemble public support, in some cases precipitating optimism as well as critical concerns. Would the thousands of people attending Zoom and Facebook livestreams offer effective challenges to the hegemony of fossil fuels that has 'fossilized' [75] Canadian public institutions? For some, the awareness that Canada's extractivism was in an amplification mode was perhaps tempered by hopeful images online of some cities suddenly less polluted due to COVID-related shutdowns elsewhere, in a panoply of conflicting images representing different visions of energy injustices, disaster capitalism and future possibilities on Indigenous land.

Two forms of visuals depicting manifestations of state violence emerged conspicuously in June of 2020. First, drone-captured photographic evidence of new spills from TMX [76] bringing to light one of more than 80 spills by Trans Mountain and the fourth spill at this location in fifteen years, according to the Sumas First Nation Chief; such imagery conveyed the ecological degradation and immediate health risks to water – and, notable given the raging COVID-19 pandemic, the desecration to the burial lands of the Indigenous victims of a 1782 smallpox epidemic [77]. The Trans Mountain Corporation would ultimately respond by halting operations for a lone 1-day period, promising to review processes for the future. Another new development in June in reconfiguring the politics of visibility took the form of photographic evidence of police racism and brutality – and what might (if we misleadingly fall into the trap of assuming 'normality' is non-violent) be called 'spectacular violence'. Whilst the world erupted in protests after the brutal murder of George Floyd in the US on May 25 was caught on camera, and the Black Lives Matter protests took centre stage as a global movement, the role of the RCMP in Canada with regards to Indigenous people also ascended into the public eye. In June, video evidence of RCMP brutalizing Indigenous women and men – and RCMP killings of Indigenous people – surfaced. Addressing police violence, various observers opined that officials would likely have denied this racist violence had it not been visually captured.

Yet, on the other hand, the availability of visuals does not, of course, dictate political outcomes. At a time when many have been arguing for defunding the police and instead resourcing underfunded public services, the RCMP deflected systemic racism concerns by promoting technical visual fixes, namely body-cams that could (with more funding) be added to police units. Notwithstanding the potential usefulness of images from body-cams, this type of pseudo-surveillance of the police by the police stands in stark contrast to police surveillance of those contesting the vision of the petro-state. Indeed there is now growing literature that critiques how political elites have positioned the adding of police body cameras as a 'solution' to issues of systemic racism and racist police violence [78]. Although some petitions in 2020 reignited pushes for police body cameras, the BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) argued that attention is urgently needed elsewhere on more fundamental anti-racist measures: 'Why would we, as a jurisdiction, put more money into a solution that is ineffective and fundamentally doesn't address the issue of police violence?' the BCCLA executive director explained to the media. 'It's a technological solution to something that has systemic roots…It's much more of a band-aid-type solution' [79]. As noted by others, 'Body-worn cameras are tools organized, controlled and deployed by police. To elevate its importance as a reform measure is to anoint the police perspective as the most legitimate perspective' [80]. Reacting to the Black Lives Matter movement, a stark illustration of optical allyship in June 2020 soon appeared in media images across the country in the form of a photo of the Canadian Prime Minister bending the knee in solidarity against racialised injustices endured by black and Indigenous peoples in Canada – alongside his words in support of body cams. Perhaps compared with right-wing politicians who refused to take the knee [81] this visual display seemed progressive, yet many Indigenous leaders and allies argued, in response, that systemic racism cannot be genuinely addressed amidst proliferation of environmental injustices on Indigenous territories. As one land protector pondered on social media with a thought bubble graphic, perhaps the Canadian Prime Minister's famous 21 second delay [82] in answering a press question about US police violence was because he was thinking about violent policing in Canada against Indigenous land defenders.

'Seeing' critically in this context requires understanding the blatant disjuncture between, on one hand, optical performances of 'allyship' through anti-racist gestures and, on the other hand, the ongoing ramping up of fossil fuel violence in Indigenous communities. It requires engaging with the violent history of colonialism on land that was never surrendered, and, confronting superficial optical allyship. As articulated powerfully by Mi'kmaq lawyer and scholar Pam Palmater in her book Warrior Life, without carefully understanding and radically addressing the oppressive sociocultural and political structures underpinning colonisation and dispossession, and the laws, attitudes and policies that continue these dynamics, oil pipeline violence and neo-colonial environmental racism will persist in Canada's settler-colonial landscape – and vigorous Indigenous-led resistance will continue too [17].

4. Beyond invisibility in the petro-state

4.1. Seeing the (non-)performativity of images, optical allyship and petro-state colonialism

In global theorising about the extraction/pandemic nexus and associated visualities, notions of 'invisibility' and 'invisibilising' have widely been invoked when characterising injustices occurring 'under the cover of COVID.' Bainton et al summoned the notion of 'invisible' where

'external visibility over local-level issues' in extractive arenas 'is limited by the remote nature' of activity [83]. As the above discussion indicates, however, the TMX and Coastal Gaslink pipeline contexts may be only partly understood in this vein. They are not 'remote' for everyone; various experiences of resistance highlight how different parts of Canada's fossil fuel pipeline construction routes were – far from being invisible – entangled in vibrant visual struggles and subjects of active resistance. On one hand, attempts to invisibilise are essential to lay bare. Alberta's government removed certain oil industry environmental reporting and monitoring requirements in 2020, and authorities responsible for the pipeline construction in BC allowed the pipeline to operate without usual monitoring as well. The suspension of official government monitoring ultimately led to legal appeals by Indigenous groups [84]. Simultaneously, state moves to invisibilise ongoing injustices during this period also conspicuously failed in notable ways, rendering it necessary to probe into how the politics of seeing and selectively visibilising are entangled in contentious power relations and intimate affects surrounding representation and interpretation. Here it is vital to ask, as Thom Davies suggests in discussing the witnessing of toxic geographies: 'out of sight' to whom?' [85]. And how are selective processes of visibilising and invisibilising political catalysts of institutional response?

As an example of selective visibilizing, 'optical allyship', defined as 'the visual illusion of allyship without the actual work of allyship' [20], occurs when someone from a nonmarginalized group professes solidarity with a marginalized group, but in a way that is meaningless, or, worse, may actually hinder movement toward the socially just goal. As other researchers have noted, the ally is often motivated by some type of reward, for example a 'virtual pat on the back for being a good person' or for 'being on the right side of a cause' [86]. As noted above, Canadian political leaders have shown various forms of 'optical allyship', including signing on to UNDRIP – and the taking of a knee in ways that have been seen as superficial gestures of support with anti-racism efforts. Such optical allyship by political elites mirrors the enthusiastic shows of allyship displayed by large fossil fuel corporations that have sponsored 'UNDRIP conferences' in BC in recent years – eager to display corporate logos at 'Indigenous rights' discussion forums while removing from discussion Indigenous peoples' right to 'free, prior and informed consent' [87].

Certain attempts to counter superficial allyship were advanced in the pipeline opposition movement, through place-based practices, for example, in events held by environmental organisations in an ecologically sensitive area earmarked by TMX for pipeline construction, where activists (mostly non-Indigenous people) were taking turns living in a giant cottonwood tree that was slated to be cut down. Walking tours with interested environmentalists and anti-colonial land protectors (physically distanced with multiple sequential groups, 10 people each, all wearing masks) included introductions to a small Indigenous Nation, Qayqayt First Nation, historically from that area but now almost invisibilised to most settler-colonial Canadians in Vancouver. The intent was the witnessing – and concretely seeing the interconnectedness – of Indigenous rights and ecological issues at stake in the Brunette Watershed, where salmon run and where other threatened species nest, live and interact (Fig. 8); it was also partly about challenging epistemologies that are not grounded in place-based learning and the place-based histories of colonial struggle – and of ecosystem rehabilitation – into which pipeline colonialism intrudes.

Explicit in these place-based learning events were explorations of what it

Fig. 8. Endangered Water, Salmon, Hummingbirds and Webs of Life in the Brunette Watershed. Monitoring has indicated that cutting down trees and other pipeline-building activities pose severe threats to salmon, which impacts local Indigenous people and the ecosystem as a whole, apart from the damage from bitumen itself. Corporate responses for this have been to turn to artificial "fish farms" as a replacement for wild salmon. The two photos on the left (taken by the author) were from riparian zones by the Brunette River, Burnaby, shortly before trees were cut down, part of a planned removal" of 1308 tress by TMX in this region. After cutting down of these trees proceeded in 2021, a local movement of land defenders also captured photographs of threatened (legally protected) species of hummingbirds and their nests destroyed by clearcutting, which they sent to the Canadian Energy Regulator. A statement from TMX read "An inspection was conducted with no nest visible or identified in the working area" in April of 2021. However, land defenders established a Community Nest Finding Network (CNFN) that produced proof contradicting TMX's assertion (reflected by the photo on the right, by Sara Ross, reproduced here with permission). This resulted in a forced pausing of the TMX construction activities for four months during nesting season, after numerous federally protected nests were destroyed. Chief Judy Wilson, a leader from the BC Union of Indian Chiefs, spoke of the significance of the hummingbirds in Indigenous knowledge systems on April 26, 2021: "If the hummingbirds are gone, there's a big problem we have. They are the pollinators, the ones keeping the balance and harmony on our land, the indicators for that."

"

means to link experiences to direct actions. After TMX tree-cutting and pipe installation was delayed by land defenders staying in trees, TMX applied for an exemption to regulations against ecosystem disruption during the salmon run season. Some TMX personnel asserted that there were no salmon at the time. Land defenders then assembled photographic and video evidence to the contrary, while also placing red dresses on the fence around TMX construction zones to allude to the ongoing state violence against Indigenous women which includes threats created by fossil fuel pipeline mancamps (construction camps of men). Forest destruction proceeded in April 2021 in this region, but land defenders assembled photographic evidence on TMX's illegal destruction of Anna's hummingbird nests, protected under the Federal Migratory Birds Convention Act. This evidence forced regulatory authorities to conduct inspections and issue a 4-month suspension to TMX activities. Human and more-than-human relations were also important dimensions of other placed-based learning experiences organised by Secwepemc women who – for example, after a court injunction hearing in the BC Supreme Court building – led online visual tours of struggles on unceded Secwepemc land further north in the province along the TMX route. Here the purpose was to share the witnessing of environmental destruction from drilling and putting pipelines under a sacred river, endangering water sources which are the lifeline for communities; and to reflect on how energy injustices are racial and intersectional. Linked to such experiences were online discussions of Secwepemc law to stop TMX, and learning about economic, cultural and health threats that the Canadian Energy Regulator has not acknowledged. One of the online sessions was held just after a BC Supreme court judge had told a young Secwepemc woman that Secwepemc laws were irrelevant – before her trial even began.

Some visual tactics at rallies contrasted how the federal government subsidizes unwanted fossil fuel pipelines through Indigenous land while abjectly failing to live up to promises to fund much-needed water pipes to support Indigenous communities which currently have unsafe water.[14] Ultimately, visualising fossil fuel contestations in Canada in a context of faux decolonization risks perpetuating what Eve Tuck calls the 'damage-centred' gaze, that sees Indigenous people as victims and subjects of governance without meaningfully engaging theories of relationships and change that emerge from situated Indigenous ways of knowing, gathering and mobilising [89]. Recognising perils of superficial apolitical 'climate justice' organising that lack intersectional engagement with structures of white supremacy, various coalitions have indeed actively organised to better understand ways of knowing and mobilising that re-centre respect for the land, Indigenous cultures, Indigenous leadership and care for all lifeforms. Many supporters at the courthouse in the 2021–2021 period became not only increasingly aware that – but also how - Indigenous people have been disproportionately targeted by state surveillance and policing.

Various movement events have prominently embraced the artwork of Christi Belcourt, a Métis visual artist whose work invites thoughtful engagement with decolonial futures and Indigenous epistemologies, exploring relationalities, in particular, with water and non-human worlds [90] (Fig. 9). Prior to the COVID era, Christi Belcourt travelled to many communities lending her art to movements; and during the COVID pandemic, went online offering rich reflections on Indigenous environmental activism through art, fish that have developed cancers, systems of extractivism that have failed to respect the sacred, and Indigenous values emphasising respect and reciprocity [91]. Secwepemc water protection events have centred women's practices of quilt-making, bringing together dozens of people's hand-sewn home-made patches for community quilts for clean water, sharing these in ceremonies (shown online and in person) before court proceedings begin

Fig. 9. Water is Life. The author was given this print to carry by an Indigenous elder during a water and land protection event at Holmes Creek in Burnaby, near TMX construction. A print of Christi Belcourt's artwork, it depicts the spiritual and health significance of clean water in the web of life, a theme that has been prominent in the movement against fossil fuel expansion. Christi Belcourt's work has been silkscreened onto thousands of banners across North America, seen at many climate and environmental protection gatherings, with her contributions supporting the use of art in movements to recognise the "concept of living in balance with all creation" [90]. Photo source: author.

(Fig. 10). Complementary visual practices have focused on animal worlds in challenging the anthropocentric forms of capitalism and ecocide that deny voice to more-than-human ecosystems (Fig. 11), as illustrated vividly in the artwork of Marta Robertson-Smyth, whose final years were devoted to empathy-inspiring artwork and whose death in December 2020 leaves behind a vast legacy for the movement. As the pandemic continued to rage on, and the building of fossil fuel capitalism continued, additional complementary artistic practices depicted online court proceedings where settler-colonial judges have been rejecting the 'necessity to act' defence and scientific evidence (Fig. 12). And visual theatre at a rally at the BC Supreme Court building, when three Indigenous land defenders were being sentenced to 28 days in jail[15], depicted a woman dressed like the Justice Goddess in a long white dress, holding up beam-scales and a speech bubble that read 'Canada, you're incarcerating the wrong people' (Fig. 13).

Visual performance art has long been a feature of social movements. In 2021, a performance called River Talks features three women who cross cultural pathways to make art on Wet'suwet'en Territory; during a

[14] Alongside visuals of oil pipeline construction amid COVID-19 shutdowns, it is noteworthy that the pandemic was used as the reason for the federal government's delay in completing (much-needed) water systems in Indigenous communities that still have boil-water advisories, despite government promises made [88].

[15] Anti-Indigenous prejudice on display in court led the author and another observer to write a detailed complaint to the Canadian Judicial Council, documenting some of the racism and flippant tone of the judge, a summary of which is available at: http://r2klegal.protestarchive.org/docs/Judicial-Complaint-Summary-12–2020.pdf

Fig. 10. The Protect Clean Water Quilt. The Protect Clean Water Quilt, sewn with 90 squares from water protectors, travelled to the BC Supreme Court building on January 20th, 2020, for a ceremony and as a blessing and protection for those who are standing up to defend earth and enforce the Secwepemc Nation's clear refusal of the Trans Mountain Pipeline through their territories. (Photo source: author; reproduced with permission of Secwepemc say No to TMX).

January Zoom call, the artists shared their connection with the river, as 'a powerful force, a place of meeting, supplier of salmon, landscape of humbling magnitude, connector of ecosystems, flowing artery between rural and urban, front door of our communities.' The plan is for audience members to be in rafts and along the banks, with some floating down the river, passing dance and music at the pace of the current[16]. Another politically powerful artistic contribution is the work entitled 'Beyond Unceded Territories', by Cowichan/Syilx First Nations artist-activist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. This artist confronts issues of colonization, climate change and oppression in an interactive artistic virtual reality that makes issues tangible for audiences when they adopt – unwittingly – the virtual body of a destroyer by taking on the role of evil 'Super Predator' depicted in his surrealist world. "Hold and release to throw" the screen says, as the virtual reality makes the user throw oil onto a bright natural landscape. [17]Despite structural racism and colonialism that has long denied Indigenous artists resources and exhibition opportunities that have been available to non-Indigenous artists, some Indigenous artists have indeed been radically adapting new virtual reality technology while retaining cultural traditions to confront contemporary colonialism [92]. In studying visual politics attention will be increasingly warranted not only to art forms and images long employed in movements, but also to the use of new technologies in visual art that further serve as a counter-hegemonic force in fossil fuel struggles. Notably, in Unceded Territories, while this virtual reality pits a destructive 'Super Predator' against the environment, the simulation's star is the colourful Ovoidism, conveying Indigenous culture and relations with the natural world. The artist's voice asks: "why are you throwing that oil?" and reflects on challenges of embracing Indigenous identities outside of colonial narratives and defending against destructive capitalist systems.

4.2. *Revisiting the dialectics of visual practices in fossil fuel struggles*

Despite what was dubbed the 'pictorial turn' [93], and attention to 'visual culture' in collective elaboration of meaning, researchers from various

Fig. 11. Who Will Speak for Us. This photograph shows artistic pieces by Marta Robertson-Smyth held by environmental defenders at numerous land and water protection events. Her creative artwork vividly shows the more-than-human worlds at stake. The "who will speak for us" on orcas reminds us how western cultures need to be more attuned to listening and learning from the agency of animals. The Tsleil-Waututh Nation took the Canadian government to court partly due to disastrous effects that increasing tanker traffic would have on orcas; the artistry here invites more thinking along these same lines. As one of the people arrested early in 2018 for allegedly violating the court injunction against blocking access to TMX, Marta Robertson-Smyth attended many trials and sentencing hearings of others, in solidarity. Along with Pia Massie, another artist, she challenged the court injunction against occupying the public space in front of the TMX gates. Her words underscored her intent behind peaceful resistance: 'Contrary to the notion that by sitting at the gate we have acted in contempt of the law, I feel we have deliberately placed ourselves at the mercy of the law…For the greater good we have gambled that the court will find that the duty to stand up for the protection of the environment and survival of future generations supercedes the right of a corporation to pursue its business through illegitimate permission of the government of the day.' As a fellow land protector remarked after she passed away on December 31,2020: 'Marta Robertson-Smyth showed the world the revolutionary power of art-making.' Her paintings of sea life and children became highly recognisable signs at environmental protests for years in Vancouver and taught many how to connect with the work of land and water protectors through visual empathy. Photo credit: Murray Bush (reproduced with permission).

disciplines of political studies have been slow to transfer debates on images and visual practices to their area of research [94]. As digital photography greatly increased the number of potential producers of images of injustices and facilitated their inexpensive immediate dissemination [95], interest has grown in performative dimensions of art, images and visual practices within a vast variety of social struggles. With respect to fossil fuels, the sections above illustrate how the state-fossil fuel industry nexus synergistically employs a repertoire of hegemonic visual practices to i) promote a misleading utopian vision of settler-colonial extractivism, ii) invisibilize what the fossil fuel industry wishes not to be seen, and iii) visibilise an image of land defenders aimed at undermining legitimacy, while all the while iv) intensifying surveillance of those who oppose its settler-colonial values for 'development', and v) concurrently distracting the public from social concerns with optical allyship and technological solutions. Importantly, though, these tactics are opposed with interrelated realms of counter-hegemonic visuality i) using a myriad of creative artistic modalities to depict alternative visions of human and non-human interactions, ii) (counter)watching to monitor the ongoing environmental, health, safety and rights transgressions, iii)

[16] https://www.bclocalnews.com/entertainment/artists-discuss-the-river-talks-project-on-zoom/
[17] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cyl7IdwQJV4

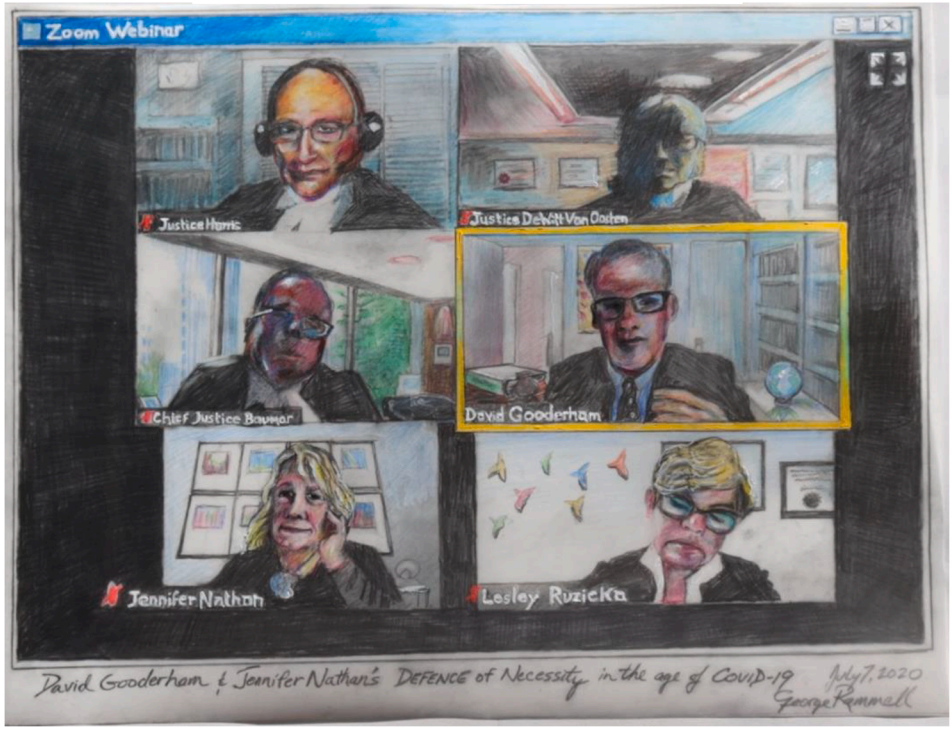


Fig. 12. Courtroom Drawing in the Age of Covid-19. This drawing by George Rammell (reproduced here with permission) depicts the "Zoom" proceedings of retired lawyer, David Gooderham, and science teacher, Jennifer Nathan, at the BC Court of Appeals, appealing their convictions for protesting the TMX. On November 26, 2020, the piece was re-titled 'All Our Institutions have Failed Us'. Following a 2 ½ year legal fight, David Gooderham was incarcerated, with the court rejecting his efforts to expose the incompatibility of TMX with promised emission reduction targets. The visual captures the moments in which the Court of Appeals not only rejected the necessity to act defence but declined the motion to hear scientific evidence on greenhouse gas emissions; the trial judge had declared that negative climate impacts of the fossil fuel-related emissions were 'foreseeable and likely' but not 'virtually certain' More can be read about David Gooderham's legal arguments here: https://dagooderham.com/legalaction/

Fig. 13. Courthouse Steps on Stolen Unceded Indigenous Land. The visual performance here reclaims the public steps of the courthouse, showing to those walking and driving by that Canada's courts have a racist problem on Indigenous land. The day I took this photograph in November 2020, three Indigenous defendants faced a judge who had repeatedly refused to acknowledge that the land was unceded Indigenous territory, referring to it as an "alleged fact" despite the Canadian Bar Association British Columbia Branch stating that the land is "traditional and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish and Musqueam First Nations" (https://www.cbabc.org/Home). The judge made negative statements about the three Indigenous land defenders lives before issuing punishment and asserted that there are no Indigenous laws relevant to their conducting ceremonial practices and praying in front of the TMX, despite local Indigenous elders giving detailed testimony to the contrary (Photo source: author).

witnessing fossil fuel violence on land and in the courtroom, and iv) widely disseminating these visual manifestations. Fig. 2 illustrated linkages amongst various visual practices of the fossil fuel-state nexus and amongst various counter-hegemonic visual practices, highlighting dialectical relations characterizing anti-colonial pipeline resistance struggles; it gives an indication of just some of the interrelations at play and seeks to visually 'decentre' the fossil fuel state-industrial complex. As shown in Table 1, each of the visuals presented in this article speak to different visual moments – of watching, witnessing and resisting – each inextricably linked to other visual practices.

These practices can all be understood alongside growing concerns about how Canada's fossil fuel monitoring and governance dynamics are bound up in networks of knowledge, finance and power that routinely re-entrench the 'colonial politics of recognition' [96–98]. Michelle Daigle emphasizes that 'recognition-based strategies are founded on and materially reproduce colonial imaginaries of territory that continue to inflict violence on Indigenous legal and governance orders while facilitating the economic and political sovereignty of Canada' [99,p.267]. The visual practices discussed here may also be understood alongside growing critical debates around the cultural politics of fossil fuels, energy transition and movement-building amid structural violence [27], including both efforts to confront visual colonialism and to re-centre different cultural values, voices, meaning-making practices, power dynamics and creative forms.

In sites of/near pipeline construction, the engaging by Indigenous and non-Indigenous land defenders in place-based watching and witnessing of neo-colonial environmental destruction and anti-Indigenous violence can have profound galvanising effects in challenging petro-capitalism. Importantly, though, any visual experiences of ecological transformation, whether online or on-site, can easily replicate settler-colonial ways of 'gazing' through a reductive appreciation of what Mirzoeff calls 'anthropocene visuality'[100] unless there are careful efforts made to understand social, historically continuous and structurally racialised injustices. To 'see' certain aspects of racialised injustice is not necessarily to 'see' the daily experiences of such injustices, the institutional systems that uphold them, and the reciprocity-centred

Table 1
Summary of Selected Visual Practices and Visual Images of Fossil Fuel Opposition.

Type of visual practice/modality	Visual matters/relations depicted	Implications
1. Watching and witnessing (environmental, health & sovereignty violations) (Example: Fig. 1a)	Watch House on Burnaby Mountain near TMX, site for respecting sacred connections and counter-watching to report on transgressions through social media (and to regulatory authorities directly). The Watch House, erected March 2018 by members of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, stands as a place for gathering and watching acts of settler-colonialism	The Watch House serves as a focal point for building solidarity, connecting with land and spiritual responsibilities, reminding what it means to be a guest, to not culturally appropriate, and to listen, watch, learn and participate
2. Visual statement of sovereignty (Example: Fig. 3)	Totem pole beside sign about the court injunction against blocking TMX at Burnaby terminal illustrates the conflict to all those who pass by the site; a visual statement of contrasting visions for the land and society	The Totem pole, a culturally important presence, is more than just an aesthetic, also serving to bolster support for Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous-led resistance
3. Courtroom Drawing (Example: Fig. 4)	Colonial decor and iconography of BC Supreme Court - drawing of trials of land defenders, to disseminate proceedings from inside the courtroom to the public	Courtroom artists help document settler-colonial legal system, encourage awareness of injustices
4. Indigenous (Red Dress) art installation campaign (Example: Fig. 5)	Red dress placed on a fence outside the TMX construction, linking extractivism with murdered and missing Indigenous women. (The campaign consists of installations of red dresses across the country and in protest events.)	The red dress placement here reminds the public, movement activists, and also fossil fuel company personnel, of real histories lived
5. Visual statement - Colourful posters (Example: Fig. 6)	Armed invasion of Wet'suwet'en territory, posters placed in many sites, complementing photographic evidence of police violence in a time of so-called "reconciliation".	Raises awareness that struggles continue, calling on allies to support Indigenous-led struggles for sovereignty and resistance to extractivism; sparked widespread solidarity blockades across Canada and support internationally
6. Photograph taken though counter-watching (of health and safety violations) (Example: Fig. 7)	Photos (including those taken by Indigenous elders) during the pandemic widely disseminated through social media, as evidence of disregard by TMX for health and safety of their workforce and nearby communities	Photos like these helped bring about charges against TMX as well as some changes; document litany of violations that industry regulators overlook; illustrate value of disseminating visual evidence
7. Photographs and on-site art installations (of more-than-human impacts) (Example: Fig. 8)	In Brunette Watershed, site of TMX tree clearcutting, photos documented dangers to salmon, water and hummingbirds –that intensified during the pandemic when embodied resistance was constricted and corporate transgressions intensified; art installations and drawings show more-than-human agency	Visual images reminded that TMX actions were slated to destroy ecosystems needed for salmon and all life; policy impacts also ensued when land defenders' photos forced corporate delay
8. Indigenous art print in rallies (water is life) (Example: Fig. 9)	Print of Christi Belcourt's art depicting spiritual and health significance of clean water in web of life, shown prominently in gatherings and informational events	Indigenous representations of web of life present contrasts to the settler-colonial vision of dominance over nature
9. Quilt (Example: Fig. 10)	The Secwepemc Protect Clean Water Quilt, sewn with 90 squares from water protectors, travelled to the BC Supreme Court building	Shows Secwepemc clear refusal of the TMX pipeline through Secwepemc territories
10. Paintings and artistic placards (Example: Fig. 11)	Marta Robertson-Smyth's artistic placards and other visual art used in protest events, including aquatic species impacted by TMX	Art evokes affective and cognitive appreciation of multi-species and inter-generational stakes
11. Courtroom drawing during COVID pandemic (Example: Fig. 12)	George Rammell's drawing of online court proceedings against land defenders under COVID-19 physical distancing	Captures legal challenges to the settler-colonial system's denial of fossil fuel-linked climate breakdown as imminent threat
12. Visual performance art (Example: Fig. 13)	Visual performance in front of the courthouse during the pandemic, where land defenders were being sentenced to jail	Theatrical presentation of injustice and racism unfolding in the building, on stolen land, raises critical consciousness

epistemologies underpinning visions for radical change. As noted by Metcalfe in gesturing to Hunt's work 'Researching within relations of violence: Witnessing as methodology' [33], 'witnessing from an outsider vantage point begins to locate the settler researcher within a set of human and non-human relations whereby one's responsibility for descriptive articulation is rooted in anti-colonialism, consciously rejecting the so-called dispassionate objectivity of Western scientific methods' [34]. Discussing her own photographic autoethnography, Metcalfe goes on to note that 'witnessing ecological change…may risk overlooking and misrecognizing the intimate visceral violence of colonialism towards the lives and bodies of Indigenous people' [34, p. 82]. To echo these cautions, it needs to be stressed that 'seeing' critically needs listening, and that listening needs to engage with the nuances of intimate accounts of experience. The point for both those watching and witnessing in physical and virtual land protection events was not just to see fossil fuel environmental damage but to see the intertwined

structures of oppression and genocide[18] as well as efforts toward much-needed anti-colonial alliance-building; and to engage some of the needed efforts at bridging ways of seeing, knowing and doing differently, disrupting contemporary colonial imaginations with stories and ontologies of peoples who have lived on the land for far longer than the settler-colonial story [103]. The critical point with respect to visual practices and visual cultures is that environmental 'seeing' without meaningful engagement with the violence of superficial 'decolonization' can gloss over the vast depths of continuing colonial dispossession as a structurally produced set of ongoing relations, all the while trivialising the extensive anti-Indigenous racism built into the settler-colonial legal system that criminalises Indigenous land defence.

5. Concluding remarks

This article underscores just some ways in which visual practices matter in making sense of the expanding frontiers of fossil fuel extractivism in the 2018–2021 period. While offering critical vantage points for "seeing" the 'petrocultures'[104] of economic and political elites, visual interactions may also, as importantly, serve as stimuli for anti-racist dialogue and building movements to address everyday racist and colonial violence. Discussing three periods of fossil fuel struggles though images from 1) before and during the initial period of this research in 2018–2019; 2) images of militarised police raids that sparked a nationwide movement in early 2020 in tandem with the red dress campaign; and finally 3) engaging reconfigurations of visual politics in the COVID-19 era, the analytical approach presented here emphasises the dialectical relationship between the petro-state's visual tactics and counter-hegemonic visual practices. In an age of social media, the power of images to quickly generate visceral impacts is unparalleled – unquestionably certain forms violence could have been hidden from widespread view had they not been visually captured. Many have noted this in the wake of the George Floyd killing by a policeman in the U.S., where video footage led to hundreds of thousands of people marching in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement; this applies as well to the context of violent police intrusions on Indigenous land in Canada. While some visual encounters harken to 'evidence' in particular historical moments, the afterlives these images have require situated attention from diverse vantage points. Both in understanding specific visual practices and wider constellations of practices, it becomes increasingly necessary for academics to consider how visual politics are embedded in diverse and long-term trajectories of struggle. Some visual practices can wound, stigmatize, or convey a highly superficial sense of reconciliation and anti-racism. Diverse experiences may be mediated in part by class, race, gender and other dimensions of difference can inflect understandings of fossil fuel injustice as well as choices about which visuals matter, and which meanings and relations a visual practice conveys.

In societies under the gaze of a petro-state's surveillance – surveillance that is increasingly pervasive, different sensibilities in mixing critical visual methodologies and approaches offer ways for confronting racist and colonialist ways of seeing. As Roland Bleiker argues, visual politics are best understood through multiple methods across a range of sites and modalities in a rhizomatic fashion, with attention to assemblage theory in allowing each method to retain its own logic [35]. Here, the research techniques weaved together witnessing in a courtroom and reflecting on artist drawings, on-site observing with Indigenous elders from a sacred Watch House, and participating in visually-rich embodied resistance in places of land protection, moving to online observation and physically-distanced events. This speaks to one trajectory for mixing research methods prior to and amid the COVID pandemic. Other orientations might take on different ways of combining analysis of photographs, drawings, and other practices that link to fossil fuel infrastructures and the people and places affected by them; various possibilities exist in taking up Gillian Rose's call to bring together discussions of visual methods and visual cultures [3], knitting together visuals with wider understandings of how critical resistance is in dialectical friction with state and corporate visual strategies. Taking up this challenge means, I have suggested, grappling both with studying an expanding array of corporate/state visual/surveillance strategies and an expanding diversity of visual counter-measures. This requires understanding how practices of seeing, watching and witnessing can be subjected to disruptions as well as moments of dramatic reconfiguration, whether in the form of a pandemic or otherwise.

Harkening to hegemony in the Gramscian sense, Proulx and Crane, in discussing materialized discourses in the Standing Rock struggle, describe company efforts as 'a political attempt to articulate a particular way of seeing land as if it is universal and also to foreclose the possibility of legitimate contestation' [105,p.56]. By examining visual dynamics in pipeline opposition and Indigenous-led resistance, this article builds on this conceptualization, focusing on ways of seeing that have facilitated the dispossession of Indigenous people through presenting fossil fuel expansion as inevitable, and in the national interest. More importantly, though, by witnessing settler-colonialism as an ongoing yet contingent process and structural relationship, this article (re)positions colonial violence not as inevitable but as subject to contestation, counter-hegemonic surveillance and disruption by alternative visions of energy futures and solidarity-building. As political and economic elites continue to champion fossil fuel plans that strive to create an aura of inevitability, re-thinking visual worlds of evidence and 'more than representational' communication offers urgent avenues for research – and for critically exploring what participation means in political terrains of resistance, where 'formal' avenues for "democratic participation" are intensely constricted [106,107]. While some constellations of visual practices may broadly fall under the rubric of 'common movements' and coalesce in significant ways, for example against oil pipelines, they are never straightforward – but rather embedded in a vast multitude of purposes, aspirations and relations. Certain visualities may unsettle the status quos of systemic racism and energy injustice but can also be embedded in ongoing dynamics of hegemonic visuality, requiring new critically informed commitments towards anti-colonial ways of seeing and mobilising for future energy alternatives.

[18] During the final stages of completing this article, the unmarked graves of 215 Indigenous children forcibly taken from their parents and put into church-run "residential schools" were identified in Kamloops (BC) and another 751 unmarked graves of other Indigenous children were found in Saskatchewan. It is widely understood that many others will be uncovered in the coming months and years. The international news stories that emerged put genocide by Canadian settler-colonialism in full view, even in news media that routinely invisibilised genocide and the machinery of colonialism in which atrocities are embedded. Yet, much of the media continued to artificially dissociate atrocities in "residential schools" from the very purposes for which these were set up by the settler-colonial state, which centrally had to do with controlling lands and resources, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada acknowledges explicitly [101]. As Christi Belcourt voiced in an online post in June 2021: "Canadians need to connect the dots between residential schools and resource extraction. Between child welfare and resource extraction. Between MMIWG2S [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People] and resource extraction. It's always been about the land." (For more on the linkages between genocidal policies and land and resource theft, see also Manuel and Derrickson [102]).

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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